DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 574 PS 014 199

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TITLE Keynote Address of Senator Richard G. Lugar National Forum on Excellence in Education (Indianspolis, Indiana, December 8, 1983).
PUB DATE Dec 83
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Educational Change; Educational Finance; *Educational Improvement; *Educational Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; Public Policy; Public Schools; *Social Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Few Americans understand the extent to which our nation is at risk. While our ability to compete on an international scale has diminished, our commitment to national defense and social programs and the costs for such programs have increased. The solution to this general predicament lies in the competition of ideas and ideals and in the maximization of freedom of trade and the laws of comparative advantage. This solution implies reform of the nation's schools, but the reform should be directed at the state and local levels, not, as in the past, at the federal level. In addition, this reform must extend beyond improving educational practices. The crisis of American education is that, as a people, we do not understand the importance of academic achievement to our national well-being. The plaudits of each of us should be directed toward academic achievement and to the development of successful competitors on the intellectual playing fields. Great moments in sport will come and go, but the academic achievers are those who will keep international peace, provide jobs for the American people, and enrich the cultural life of this country. We have been a nation at risk because we have not cared enough about learning. As leaders in education and as policy makers, our job at the national, state, and local levels is to help to forge a new ethos in which learning, scholarship, and education are important. (RH)

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF SENATOR RICHARD G. LUGAR

National Forum on Excellence in Education
Indianapolis, Indiana
December 8, 1983

PS 014199

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The National Commission on Excellence in Education recently reported that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur - others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments."

The Commission report concludes the next paragraph with the dismal finding that "we have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament."

Thus the stage is set for another national discussion of educational reform and the roles and responsibilities which levels of government and other actors in the education drama should assume if we accept the reality of the crisis and are determined to address it. Some skeptics may experience a sense of deja vu in the demands for urgent reforms. But I will argue that the current criticisms are compelling in their emphasis on international interdependency and the underlying premise that the United States will suffer a severe decline in employment, in the standard of living for most citizens, and perhaps even in an eroding defense capability if we are insufficiently bright and competitive as a people.

The truth of our predicament has not sunk in for most Americans. The extent of our peril is not well understood. For many years, the federal government of the United States has entertained no hope of paying the bills which we have accumulated in our democracy for services and supports which we have demanded and promised to one another.

At the national level, we have established a social security system and supplemented that program with Medicare, Medicaid, and other extensive income supplement, health, and nutrition programs. Over half of the federal budget, or over $400 billion, is spent on social programs and supplementary income payments to individuals. Only about half that much is spent on defense. More than $100 billion a year is required to pay interest on a national debt of roughly a trillion and a half dollars. In the last fiscal year, we fell short of paying our bills by $195 billion.

A few educators will suggest that the federal government should cut defense spending and raise taxes in order to narrow an intolerable deficit. I have no doubt that defense expenditures will be scrutinized even more carefully in years to come and our fervent attempts to reach arms control accords with the Soviet Union will be pursued vigorously. But the majority of dollars in the defense budget go to pay and support directly 2.1 million Americans employed in a volunteer armed service. As a nation, we have opposed the draft. As a nation, we have committed ourselves to pensions and health care for those who have served our country in the past.

We are also committed to keeping the peace through continuous development of credible deterrence to attack on our country. Credibility implies an invulnerable deterrent capability and that requires scientific genius and money.

I have found few persons at education reform meetings who advocate substantial cuts in social security, Medicare, Medicaid or food stamp payments. I have found equally few who support cutting veterans benefits or reinstituting the draft and paying active duty personnel lower wages to save money.

The difficult truth is that we have made fundamental decisions in our democracy and have committed long and sizable streams of income to tens of millions of our fellow citizens who claim legal entitlement to these funds now and in the future.

Other citizens have suggested that raising taxes on individuals and businesses will generate revenues necessary for a variety of worthy programs. Each such suggestion assumes that further taxes will have no harmful impact on economic growth, and that modernization and job creation can proceed effectively with smaller returns on capital investment.

The jury may still be out on the question of whether lower taxes stimulate individuals and firms to produce more, to invest more, and to risk more - factors which will surely be required for maintaining our standard of living. But we have embarked on this course because our economic growth in recent years had come to a virtual halt and because we saw no better alternative. No growth means no prospect for ever paying the bills we have now, to say nothing of the downstream consequences of our promises of income and health care to all who are legally entitled.

Now into this general predicament comes a national inquiry into education. At almost the same time that our country has been staggered by the realization that firms in other nations may be producing cars and various steel products at less cost than we are, and that many Americans judge the quality of foreign products as superior to some American entries, we note that American high school students are compiling achievement scores which rank well behind students in other nations. They rank behind those nations whose populations are currently producing goods and services which threaten to overwhelm many American firms and to eliminate jobs for millions of American wage earners. What, then, does the future hold?

Of course, many Americans do not see a crisis in industry or in education. The America which they choose to see is our country at a time when exports and imports were less than 5% of the Gross National Product. When informed of our extraordinary interdependence with the rest of the world, they wish to go back. Some Americans demand simply that we build tariff walls and other protectionist devices to save American industry, American jobs, American prices and, unfortunately, American economic stagflation. This is a policy of no growth, and it will not pay our bills.

I believe that a majority of Americans know that our country will thrive only to the extent that we are successful in the competition of ideas and ideals and to the extent that we maximize freedom of trade and the laws of comparative advantage. In our domestic economic policies, we are now undertaking substantial deregulation of transportation, financial institutions, and energy resources because we believe that a majority of Americans will receive better services and better values from this stimulation of competition.

But expanded trade internationally and deregulation at home have created enormous and often wrenching adjustments for millions of Americans. Many Americans are demanding protectionism and re-regulation by the federal government in order to restore economic advantages which were enjoyed by some groups before the new rigors of competition were felt so keenly.

My own suggestions for what we ought to do carry the burden of certain experiences which have emboldened me to speak up. I attended the public schools in the City of Indianapolis, manufactured capital machinery for world competition with a brother who was an engineering genius, served for three years on thc Indianapolis School Board from 1964-1967, a time of ferment in civil rights activity and compensatory education ideas in our city, served as Mayor of Indianapolis for eight years, and have served as United States Senator for the last seven years. As one who has survived this sequence of public and private careers, I speak today with conviction that compassion, intelligence, and successful political action can be combined and will be combined to meet our educational challenges.

My first suggestion is that public education should be clearly understood as a responsibility of local school districts and state governments. For many years, educational reformers have fixed their eyes on the federal government and federal revenues. That fixation is bound to be futile, because the federal government will be hard pressed within the forseeable future to meet the safety net and defense needs of the country and to maintain sufficient credibility to borrow hundreds of billions of dollars to meet those obligations.

Federal legislators have authorized educational expenditures in the past. The G.I. bill in 1944, science and mathematics instruction in the National Defense Education Act of 1958, emphasis on disadvantaged students in 1965, and subsidized and guaranteed student loans in the 1970's were important national programs. In 1981-2, the federal government supplied 10% of school dollars. But substantial new monies will not be forthcoming. Dynamic national economic growth will be required even to meet the obligations we have already undertaken.

The role of state governments will increase both from an organizational and financial standpoint. Our constitutional system gives states the ability to reorganize school districts and to help equalize the flow of expenditures per child. States also have the opportunity to reorganize the civil governments of urban areas and to maximize the efficiency with which the governments, special and general, work together. Such political reorganization is hard and politically dangerous work. Raising revenues to pay for more services is equally dangerous. Without economic growth, many state governments will face strong taxpayer resistance and most states will not be able to afford large increases in educational funding. Each request for funds will be weighed carefully against demands for road and bridge repair, prison reform, and environmental reform, important objectives which have well organized constituencies.

Local school systems will compete for funds with local governments with priorities similar to state governments, plus the imperatives of better police and fire protection and more efficient waste collection.

Capital is scarce throughout the world. It will be difficult to borrow money at any level of government and the interest costs will be high even in recovery periods such as the present one. These are realities.

In my judgment, the administration will not request substantial new funds for education, the Congress will not appropriate $7 billion or $11 billion, or $21 billion of new money, and teacher salaries will not be increased by 25% across the board. These things will not happen because the federal government will be deep in deficits which have arisen in connection with other public policy objectives. I would predict, too, that taxpayers at the state and local level will not wish to pay every teacher, regardless of talent or merit, more money just for the sake of it. Given skepticism about the ways in which educational time is spent, the idea of extending the school day or the school year will most likely be debated case by case.

Having said all that, I predict that citizens will decide to spend more money on education and I believe it is important to note that record of support in recent years.

The National Journal of July 9, 1983 sets forth the following report:

> For whatever the current complaints about the schools, the problems cannot plausibly be laid to neglect. Precisely the opposite is true. Since the end of World War II, Americans have lavished money and attention on education. Consider:
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> -Between 1945 and 1975, the share of the nation's output (gross national product, or GNP) spent on all schools, including colleges and universities, rose from 2 to 8 percent. Although it declined to 6.8 percent in 1981, much of the slide reflects a shrinkage of the traditional school-age population - an aging of the "baby boom" generation - rather than a fall-off in per capita spending.

-More students than ever have remained in school - and gone further. Between 1940 and the 1970's, the proportion of students graduating from high school rose from 42 to about 75 per cent. About half of all high school graduates (or about three-eighths of all young Americans) now attend college, in contrast with a fourth (or an eighth of young Americans) in 1940.

-The teaching resources committed to students in public schools have risen significantly. Between 1959 and 1980, student-teacher ratios declined 27 per cent. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, per pupil spending - adjusted for inflation and expressed in 1979-80 dollars - rose from $395 in 1929-30 to $2,275 in 1979-80 before slipping to $2,228 in 1980-81. The growth in spending reflects more teachers, higher salaries, more remedial courses and a growing proportion of high school students, who are more expensive to educate. On paper, teachers are better qualified than ever; nearly half of primary and secondary schoolteachers hold masters' degrees, compared with less than a fourth in 1960.

-School buildings are generally more elaborate and better-equipped than they once were. As recently as 1940, more than half the nation's public elementary schools were small, one-teacher schools. Now, one-room schools make up less than 1 per cent of the total.

-Compared with all but a few advanced industrial countries - Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden - the United States spends more on education. For most countries, the gap is significant. While public spending on education in the United States was 5.7 percent of GNP on schools in 1979, France's spending was 5.3 per cent and Germany's 4.6 per cent. Japan's on the other hand, was about the same as for the United States.

My second suggestion is that we should go a little easier on predictions that the sky is falling on public educational achievement in this country. In saying this, I do not wish to define the crisis in achievement out of existence. To the contrary, the drop in Standard Achievement Test scores is real and the secular decline has been dismal. It is apparent that many students in other nations are learning faster and learning more.

In part the decline in achievement scores has come because we have asked the schools to widen responsibilities for instruction and opportunity to all Americans. It is not enough now that schools teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. They are also asked to teach children how to drive, how to cook, what to feel about emerging sexuality, how to respond to pressures regarding alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, and what to think about the prospects for nuclear war. This is a tall order for all institutions, and if schools are not succeeding fully, it is fair to say that parents, churches, and other institutions are not either.

The other - and more profound - problem associated with declining test scores and declining capabilities to perform simple intellectual tasks, is exemplified by the "greening of America" period through which our country has passed. I believe that most of us survived this period, but it is apparent that not everyone has.

The question for many young people has not been preparation for a life of competitive work, family support, or the sophisticated enjoyment of pleasures such as music, art, world literature, or civic involvement. Instead, many young and not-so-young people accepted as permanently given the affluent status of the nation and prepared to enjoy leisure alternatives which did not include serious academic discipline or achievement.

Until recently, many Americans had lost or never gained the desire to compete successfully in intellectual pursuits. A common assumption was that our large and wealthy economy would provide employment for those who wished to work and would accept them in the work force at any level of preparation they offered. Those who did not wish to work could enjoy other self-chosen pursuits with an ever-widening safety net to support them.

In fact, many Americans have never been enamored with academic work for themselves or for others. The notion that one could get by without learning to spell, read, or write very well had wide appeal. In such an atmosphere, many Americans also saw no need to serve the nation by volunteering for the armed services, or teaching school children, or entering into even modest public service.

Now all of this is changing because we are a nation at risk. We are locked in a struggle with the Soviet Union which will continue for many years and in which we must keep the peace through a credible deterrent. Our ability to keep the peace will be directly proportional to our talents as scientists, physicists, and broad-gauged diplomats with strong preparation in the liberal arts, languages, Soviet and other international studies. We will put bread on the tables of this country if our engineering, machining, and quality control is superior and if we innovate and modernize rapidly and continuously. We shall make wise decisions at all levels of government only if we learn to read and write again at all ages and to entertain serious subjects with better recognition of how scarce resources should be allocated and examine continuously the promises we have made to each other in public policy.

Achievement scores will improve when and if students really want to learn. As parents and sports fans, we stand on our heads to stimulate athletic achievement and our children achieve in a spectacular fashion. Underpaid or even unpaid coaches bask in community esteem. But when it comes to academic achievement, we have still not caught the spirit. That is the crisis of American education. We are able to appreciate the need for endless calesthenics, weight training, wind sprints, and any other preparation needed to outrun or outplay an opponent at a Friday night high school game, the NFL, or the Olympic games. But as a nation we have not grasped the significance of the sheer drudgery, the repetition, the discipline to read, to speak, and to write in clear sentences, to master foreign languages, to analyze economic and social relationships, and to master higher mathematical skills.

The plaudits of each of us in this nation had better be directed toward academic achievement and to the successful competitors on the intellectual playing fields. Great moments in sport will come and go, but the academic achievers are those who will keep international peace, provide jobs for the American people, and enrich the cultural life of this country. And we are talking about millions of achievers. It is the strength and breadth of participation in our democracy which will be of the essence.

There is a national interest in this. Young Americans ought to be concerned about it, because it is their future which is at stake. But so ought older Americans. If we cannot produce steel and automobiles and other products efficiently, who is going to pay the bills for social security? If we cannot create new products and attain new advances in productivity, who will pay for the ever-increasing demands for better and fuller health care? If we cannot remain at the cutting edge of technological developments, who will insure our security against nations which threaten us? Our national leadership has every reason to be concerned about the quality of American education. Our cultural life, our commercial life, our health, and our very survival depend upon it.

If there are dangers of elitism in the encouragement of excellence, there is surely a far greater elitism in <u>pretending</u> that standards make no difference---when we all know that they do. Is it fair to a poor, unemployed youth to pretend that his inability to command the English language is of no hindrance to him? This pretense is really the province of those who have already "made it," and it is as far from the hungry desire for learning that characterized people who are striving to better themselves as anything could be.

Those who cannot do well, those who are weak or infirm, depend the most upon a system which encourages success and creativity. Our compassion for the weak and the poor and the handicapped will be empty if we are not able to provide real help to them.

If we capture this vision for the future of American education, will highly motivated, heavily supported students achieve as much as they should with the present group of American teachers?

Obviously, teachers had better feel the warmth of our esteem, too. To recruit and to keep the best teachers for our children, we will need to pay those teachers more money and we will want to do so.

The embattled outlook of teacher organizations is understandable. The role of a protective organization in a field of declining numbers and demand might be to circle the wagons, protect all members, demand the same for all so as not to threaten unity, and to use political action to try to negate market place supply and demand equations. The United Auto Workers, The United Steelworkers, and a host of other embattled unions are attempting similar tactics. With full appreciation for the strength of teacher organizations, I pray that they will come to favor higher compensation for superior teachers and will cooperate with those who wish to remove the barriers to entry for many intelligent citizens in many walks of life to teach our children.

And while in an attitude of prayer, I will blurt out two additional pleas. Surely a nation at risk can support fast track, accelerated learning opportunities for very bright and capable students. And surely a nation at risk can encourage examination of school policies which restrict the ability of a teacher to expel troublemaking students from a classroom of students who want to learn and listen and which restrict administrators from expelling from schools various students who vent their antipathy to school attendance by disrupting the general atmosphere of the school. It will not do to point to a crisis in American education and sidetrack the whole thrust of the discussion by asserting that current arrangements are beyond challenge.

There are some hopeful signs. Many parents are demanding more homework and are pledging to spend more time encouraging study for their children. Courageous school superintendents at the local and state levels are demanding competency testing. Some students haven't been doing much reading and writing for a while, but in coming years they will, because diplomas will rest on passing a reasonable test. Bold Governors and State Legislators are spelling out concrete steps which will take planning, adjustment, and money, and they are seeking support for all three with good chances for success. Private citizens donated approximately $2 billion to public education last year, a small contribution when measured against the $116 billion of public monies. But this is a harbinger of good deeds and additional resources for the future. There must be no prohibition or discouragement of endowing public education at every level with private means.

We have been a nation at risk because we have not cared enough about learning. But this is changing, because it has dawned on many Americans that the world does not owe us obeisance and congratulations. It is now dawning on many Americans that we must compete in the world today. Once upon a time, many American firms could rest content with a broad national market in the United States. That is no longer possible. American businesses are confronted by foreign firms which are eager to succeed. Societies which do not educate their children will confront even more difficult challenges in the world. We need to foster those people who will dream what is new, who will take risks, and who will succeed.

Merely "getting by" is no proper standard at all, and those who aim no higher should not be surprised to see themselves eclipsed by others who aim at a higher goal.

In Germany, recently, a leading political figure mentioned to me that he believed that we had entered into an era in which nothing much new was happening, or would happen. The automobile had been invented, he said; all that remained was the question of how to squeeze out marginal improvements in mileage. The telephone had been invented, he said; all that remained was to make telephones in different colors and shapes. And so forth.

I find this way of thinking to be simply incredible. We are on the verge of some of the most fundamental changes in years. The transition from an industrial society to one marked more by information; the implications of all this for de-centralization (or centralization); the need for new products; the development of new generations of computers; genetic engineering; space exploration and travel---the world is as large as one's imagination.

But the thought is sobering, for it reminds us that there are two different visions of the future before us. The one, represented by the political figure I have mentioned, is tired and seeks to withdraw. It is uncertain of itself and of its abilities and of its right to play a role in the world; it is one of resignation, where the chief task of politics, economics, and education is to distribute and re-distribute a limited number of goods and services.

The other view is, I think, more in tune with the spirit of the American people. It holds that it does matter whether one does well or ill, and that one can tell the difference between the two. It holds that it is better to know than not to know, to strive than to accept, to make something well rather than poorly, to create rather than to take.

Our task is not just to distribute and to re-distribute; our task is to help to forge a new ethos in which learning is important. We need to say at the national level, at the state level, and at the local level in no uncertain terms: Scholarship is important. Learning is important. Education is important.

We may take hope from the spirit of young people who can be motivated in many different ways. Students, after all, often survive even anti-intellectual parents, mediocre teaching, and haphazard educational administration if somewhere there is one family member, one teacher or dean, one employer or coach, or even one public servant who cares deeply and lights sparks with regularity.

The nation will not be at risk if our children are determined to succeed as family members, career makers, citizens, and sensitive individuals who are in awe of nature and the best works of man. Only those who themselves know why learning is important can possibly teach important lessons to others. Our job is to light the sparks.